CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

By ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

THE *Figaro* of Paris has recently been making a feature of an inquiry as to whether or not an author should have another occupation. The inquiry was suggested by two articles that had previously appeared on the subject, one by J. H. Rosny, who argued that to earn a living by the pen an author must write entirely too much and in consequence turn out inferior work, and the other by Henri Duvernois, whose contention that an author must be an author and nothing else was summed up in the line: "I cannot see Balzac as a bank employe devoting his leisure hours to the construction of the 'Human Comedy.'" The *Figaro* has been inviting other men and women of letters to express their opinions on the subject. M. Brieux said: "I do not believe that a writer *should* have another *metier*, but I think that he *may*." Marcel Prevost said: "I think that the 'other *metier*' may be necessary, but I do not think it desirable."

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HENRI BORDEAUX said: "Literature is not a *metier*. The proof is that there have been many fine books written by amateurs. The material life of a writer should not be dependent upon the fate of his books. He can easily add one of those professions that border on letters—that of journalist or the professor or the publisher—until he has won financial independence." Marcelle Tinayre said: "I think that a writer at the beginning is very fortunate to have an occupation that assures the daily bread. He will work in independence and gain in dignity, but much energy is needed to carry on the double task." Paul Geraldy said: "Writing is not a *metier* and never will be one. Does that mean that an author should have another occupation? Not at all. I demand for him entire liberty of mind and body. But do not think that such liberty is an enviable privilege. Sound heart and brain are needed not to abuse it. The true gift of writing is the gift of living above tasks."

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SEBASTIEN-CHARLES LECONTE in his reply to the *Figaro* questionnaire sweepingly surveys the past. He says: "Authors have always been dependent upon another *metier;* with such exceptions as Byron, born a lord; Baudelaire, born an heir (too soon); Flaubert, born with a competence (although Flaubert, like Musset, became a librarian in a vague sort of way); Victor Hugo, pensioned, like Racine, for his first odes. These authors were the fortunate ones. They alone could give of their best. Imagine Flaubert or Hugo as bureaucratic underlings or grocery clerks, or Byron a 'clark' in the city, or the Goncourts transcribing like Bouvard and Pecuchet! Lamartine was a diplomat, Vigny an officer, Dumas the secretary of the Duc d'Orleans, but they escaped from these tasks with success and first success. Stendhal had to remain a vice-consul and Huysmans an assistant manager in an office. But whosoever has the noble ambition to express himself fully in a book must, even though he go hungry, partially escape from the double task."

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THESE quotations stand for the opinions of twenty or thirty other writers who have contributed to the *Figaro's* symposium. At the present time the problem is not one likely to stir up controversy among men and women of letters in the United States. The successful American writer of to-day has to have another occupation than that of writing; he must be a fairly industrious man of business to take care of the property interests derived from serial rights and royalties from his books. A generation or two ago it was entirely different. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bret Harte and W. D. Howells found it necessary to add to their incomes by serving the country as consuls abroad, and Hawthorne for a time had employment in the Salem Custom House. F. Hopkinson Smith was not only an author and an artist but a lighthouse builder as well. Edmund Clarence Stedman turned to Wall Street, and always contended that the complete change from the turmoil of the "board" to the quiet of the study enabled him to write better verse.

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BUT perhaps the most striking example of an American author assuming a double task was Henry Harland, who, known in later life as the editor of the *Yellow Book* and the author of such novels as "The Cardinal's Snuff Box," "My Friend Prospero" and "The Lady Paramount," first attracted attention by the tales he wrote under the pseudonym of "Sidney Luska." The desire to write came upon Harland in 1884, when he was 23 years of age. At that time he occupied a minor position in the New York Surrogate's office, and his hours were long—so long, indeed, that to find time for literary labor he had to adopt a scheme which practically lengthened the ordinary day. Directly after dinner he would go to bed and sleep until 1 o'clock in the morning, and then, fortified by a large cup of black coffee, would go to his desk and write steadily until breakfast time. After breakfast he betook himself to his office and performed the day's work with apparent zest.

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THE first fruit of this arduous labor was "As It Was Written," a fantastic, somewhat crude, but powerful story of a Jewish musician in New York. Harland at the time was living in his father's house in Beekman place, that quaint little street perched upon the brink of the East River almost in the shadow of the present Queensborough Bridge, and the Terrace by night was introduced as the background for the beginning of the tale, and Beekman place played its part in nearly all the subsequent stories in the same vein. The slight success of "Mrs. Peixada," which followed "As It Was Written," enabled Harland to give up his position in the Surrogates' office and devote himself entirely to literature, and after the two books mentioned quickly came "The Yoke of the Thorah," "My Uncle Florimond" and "Mr. Sonnenschein's Inheritance." Also of that period was "Grandison Mather," which may be regarded as largely autobiographical. In 1889 Harland dropped the "Sidney Luska" and went to England, where he remained until his death late in 1905.

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ENGLISHMEN, too, have their limitations, concedes Mr. G. K. Chesterton in the course of "What I Saw in America" (Dodd, Mead & Co.). Most of them know a good deal of American fiction, and nothing whatever of American politics. "They know more about the autocrat of the breakfast table than about the autocrat of the army and the people, the one great democratic despot of modern times; the Napoleon of the New World. The only notion the English public ever got about American politics they got from a novel, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'; and to say the least of it, it was no exception to the prevalence of fiction over fact. Hundreds of us have heard of Tom Sawyer for one who had heard of Charles Sumner; and it is probable that most of us could pass a more detailed examination about Toddy and Budge than about Lincoln and Lee."

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TWO weeks ago there was reference in this department of the book section to the misquotation of Rudyard Kipling's "Sussex," with which Clare Sheridan began the famous "interview." Very often this kind of misquotation is not mere carelessness; it implies a certain subtle difference between nations of approximately the same tongue in modes of expression and lines of thought. For example, here is Mr. Chesterton's version of the old familiar couplet deriding the mental exclusiveness popularly ascribed to Boston:

Here is to jolly old Boston, the home of the bean and the cod,
Where the Cabots speak only to Lowells, and Lowells speak only to God.

Now for an Englishman Mr. Chesterton did fairly well. He caught something of the flavor of the original lines. Yet between his version and the real version there is a world of significant difference.

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LIKE other English visitors before him Mr. Chesterton was much impressed by what we call the "elevator" and they call the "lift." It moves him to sententious utterance. He says: "With all that we hear of American hustle and hurry, it is rather strange that Americans seem to like more than we do to linger upon long words. Anyhow they say elevator when we say lift, just as they say automobile when we say motor, and stenographer when we say typist, or sometimes (by a slight confusion) typewriter. Which reminds me of another story that never existed about a man who was accused of having murdered and dismembered his secretary when he had only taken his typing machine to pieces. The American may have another reason for giving long and ceremonious titles to the lift. When first I came among them I had a suspicion that they possessed and practiced a new and secret religion, which was the cult of the elevator. I fancied that they worshiped the lift, or at any rate worshiped in the lift. The details or data of this suspicion it were now vain to collect, as I have regretfully abandoned it."

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MR. CHESTERTON himself sharply emphasizes that difference in language to which reference has been made in an earlier paragraph. "Suppose," he writes, "an interviewer had said that I had the reputation of being a nut. I should be flattered but faintly surprised at such a tribute to my dress and dashing exterior. I should afterward be sobered and enlightened by discovering that in America a nut does not mean a dandy but a defective or imbecile person. . . . An interviewer once asked me who was the greatest American writer. I have forgotten exactly what I said, but after mentioning several names I said that the greatest natural genius and artistic force was probably Walt Whitman. The printed interview is more precise, and students of my literary and conversational style will be interested to know that I said: 'See here, Walt Whitman was your one real red blooded man.'"

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ANOTHER book by a transatlantic visitor, Margot Asquith's "My Impressions of America" (George H. Doran Company). But there is a great difference. Mr. Chesterton is a stylist and a great literary force, whatever we may think of his opinions of America. Mrs. Asquith may be a force, but she is not a literary force, and she certainly is not a stylist. The wrapper of the book informs us that: "For frankness Margot Asquith holds the palm. Her autobiography was a storm center for months for this very reason. Now she has set down what she thinks of us after a tumultuous tour of the United States last fall. The book is brilliant and provocative and will be read and discussed for its friendly, spicy estimation of a nation she admires very greatly." Occasionally the writers of wrapper indorsements are inclined to over enthusiasm and even to exaggeration.

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IN "Tales of the Jazz Age" (Charles Scribner's Sons) Mr. Scott Fitzgerald introduces an ingenious and happy innovation in the form of a gossipy table of contents, in the course of which he imparts to the reader certain information about the origin or suggestion of the various stories. Alphonse Daudet in later life wrote a very charming series of little sketches called "The History of My Books," in which he told, for instance, that Tartarin of Tarascon had in the first draft of the famous tale been Barbarin of Tarascon; that Desiree Delobelle of "Fromont Jeune et Risler Anne" was to have been a doll's dressmaker in the original scheme of the novel, but that one day a friend of the novelist imparted the information that Dickens had already made use of that occupation in connection with a character of somewhat similar nature. Mr. Fitzgerald's "Table of Contents" slightly and modestly touches the edge of that idea. It is likely to find many imitators.

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IN connection with the first story of the collection, "The Jelly-Bean," Mr. Fitzgerald informs us that, written under strange circumstances shortly after his first novel was published, it was the first tale in which he had a collaborator, for finding that he was unable to handle a crap shooting episode introduced in the narrative, he turned it over to his wife, who, as a Southern girl, was presumably an expert on the technique and terminology of that great sectional pastime. "The Camel's Back" the author likes least of all the stories of "Tales of the Jazz Age," yet it was the one that cost him the least travail and gave him the most amusement. It was written during one day in New Orleans, begun at 7 in the morning and finished at 2 o'clock the same night, with the express purpose of buying a platinum and diamond wrist watch which cost $600. The camel part of the story is literally true.

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"MAY DAY" relates a series of events which took place in the spring of 1919. "Each of the three events," writes Mr. Fitzgerald, "made a great impression upon me. In life they were unrelated, except by the general hysteria of that spring which inaugurated the Age of Jazz, but in my story I have tried, unsuccessfully, I fear, to weave them into a pattern—a pattern which would give the effect of those months in New York as they appeared to at least one member of what was then the younger generation." The tale "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" was inspired by a remark of Mark Twain to the effect that it was a pity that the best part of life came at the beginning and the worst part at the end. Some time after he had finished the story Mr. Fitzgerald found an almost identical plot in Samuel Butler's "Note-books." Incidentally, "The Case of Benjamin Button" was the story which elicited the curious letter from an anonymous correspondent printed a few weeks ago in the book section.

Authors' Works And Their Ways

A small sheaf of letters from John G. Whittier to Elizabeth Lloyd of Philadelphia will soon be published by Houghton Mifflin Company. Whittier's friendship with the young Quakeress was known to his biographer, Pickard, but apparently he did not know that Whittier had twice proposed marriage to her. The letters are marked throughout by a shynese and reserve, a Quaker quality that gives them both individuality and charm.

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John Drew's autobiography, "My Years on the Stage," will be ready for publication by E. P. Dutton & Co. about the middle of October. It will cover almost half a century of theatrical history, wherein Mr. Drew was associated constantly with the men and women who were in the center of theatrical interest.

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James Branch Cabell's "Jurgen" is soon to become accessible to readers of French and German. A French translation by Raoul de Roussy de Sales has just been completed and will appear in France as one of the Editions de la Sirene. It will be followed by a French translation of Mr. Cabell's volume of essays, "Beyond Life," and, eventually, by a complete set of his novels and tales. The German translation will appear in the spring of 1923.

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The fourth annual Children's Book Week will be held November 12 to 18. Public libraries, bookstores, mothers' clubs, parent-teachers' associations, the schools, churches, Scout organizations, and other organizations concerned with children, each year take the opportunity of this week to emphasize the importance of books for boys and girls.